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OPINION

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WHICH IS BACK HOME ANYWAY?

GAURI DESHPANDE

THAT was a very distressing ten weeks I spent at home a couple of weeks ago. When feeling rootless and adrift in all these foreign countries, I had managed to weather the distress by telling myself that one is supposed to feel like that when away from home; but what was I to do when I felt more or less the same in India? I tried desperately to connect. I wanted some excuse — any excuse — to get out of leaving again; some sign somewhere that I was welcome, needed, wanted. I found none outside of my immediate family and friends. When I said something I thought was self-evident, people took it to be flippant, subversive or defeatist. When I criticised something, they thought I had become Japanised. I longed to find something to praise and found more cause for despair, because even my favourite standby, the individual Indian, seemed to have turned indifferent and apathetic. Good things seemed to be happening in Gujarat, and I became bitter about Maharashtra; bad things seemed to be happening in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and I said Good God, even Maharashtra is better than this, so they almost threw me out. Uttar Pradesh and Delhi seemed to be bogged down in total inefficiency and no one seemed to find it very strange and wondered what I was cribbing about. When a person I thought totally unsuited to become the president of my country was elected to become one, everyone said that he was much better than so-and-so. When I was indignant over a report by an American University praising the great strides made by India (I mean if *this* is what they call great strides, they must have thought us the rock bottom — baboons or something), everyone said, but compare us to Pakistan and Burma and the Middle East and so on. And when I said what about comparing us to Japan or at least the ASEAN countries, they said there you go again. I talked to some young people about lifestyles and women's lib and commitments and so forth; and ideas which even fifteen years ago when I was nearly their age, were not particularly revolutionary (like why should anyone get married if they don't want to, or that the kind of reservations we had now were nothing but sops thrown by a lazy Government into the face of a credulous majority), appeared to them absolutely stunning; had I stopped growing or had they? Practically every official we met was unco-operative if not outright rude and everyone seemed to take great delight in

preventing me from entering the country (at the airport) and also from leaving it. In addition they did not want to make it any easier for me to live in it either as it was virtually impossible to get any of the bare necessities in any of the cities without possessing massive amounts of money and spreading them around; and I couldn't move to the villages because no one would let me buy any land (except for a house) unless I were already a farmer, which brought to mind the old adage about swimming and entering the water. My children had grown up and grown away and they and their spouses thought me at best a grouchy anachronism and at worst an outright enemy, to be magnanimously forgiven for having committed the crime of bringing them into the world and bringing them up in a way that they thought was quite horrifyingly wrong. My poor friends had a lot to put up with in those ten weeks, and put up with it they did, hoping that soon I would be 'back home' in Japan and out of their hair. But alas, here I am, as lost and un-back-home-feeling as I possibly can, simply because life is so easy and clean and well regulated and pleasant. It is as though the Japanese have erected this enormously tough and totally unyielding barrier between themselves and the rest of us — a barrier of gentle politeness, inscrutable pleasantness and impenetrable smoothness. They see to it that you will never have any cause to complain and then you can hardly be so ungrateful as to confess to them the persistent unease that assails you in the face of their unfailing correctness.

So where am I going to feel at home at last? Perhaps, gentle reader, in your heart.

In the meantime, the Autumn Grand Tournament of Sumo is on in Tokyo and this time my favourite looks like winning the Championship, so life has its compensations and I will keep you posted on how things go.

NEHRU SANS POWER

A. G. NOORANI

IT is very fascinating as well as instructive to study a politician's writings and utterances before he assumes power. The greater the power acquired the greater is the importance of such a study. Jawaharlal Nehru wielded great power and was highly articulate. His commitment to democratic values, concern for the parliamentary system, respect for the Constitution, regard for the values and forms of public life and his vision as an upholder of secularism and as the prime architect of non-alignment are unquestionable. Yet, against each of these enormous contributions there were unfortunate lapses. His detractors magnify them. His admirers ignore them. Colleagues who fell out spend the

rest of their lives corroding themselves with petty vendetta. Professed admirers invoke his memory in defence of their own mean and unworthy actions. Nehru's life still awaits a good, thorough and, above all, balanced biography. Till that is done, one can only study such evidence as is forthcoming and comment, as objectively as one can, on aspects of his life on which the evidence throws light. In doing so, one must not forget that to few men is it given to be of one piece. Nehru was the more interesting for the fact that he was a bundle of conflicting traits.

One finds him again and again assessing a situation correctly in its *essentials* but only to add qualifications which are pointless and which lead him to equivocate on his *conclusions*. Confusion on details and clarity on essentials were odd companions in his thinking. Weakness in action was his grave failing.

The latest volume (Vol. 14) in the series *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Orient Longman, Rs. 145) contains much that confirms these impressions.

On December 28, 1945 Homi Mody wrote to Nehru "It has perplexed me to find that you have not raised your voice against the policy of cynical, brutal aggression which Russia is pursuing in Iran."

Nehru's reply dated January 14, 1946 only confirms the evidence which has come out in Dr. S. Gopal's biography, the recently published despatches of American Ambassadors and Escott Reid's memoirs that he was very much alive to Russian expansionism: "As a matter of fact I have repeatedly referred to what is happening in Iran. I have further referred to the expansionist tendency of the Soviet Union in Europe and Asia." Referring to Eastern Europe he wrote: "In all these countries there was a strong movement against these feudal relics. Soviet Russia has taken advantage of these movements, encouraged them and supported them and has helped them in a large measure to get rid of feudalism. The land has gone to the peasant. In so far as this has happened, it was a progressive step. But the manner of doing it appears to me to have been wrong and in the result a number of subservient States have been created." He could discern the expansionism but was taken in by Russia's excuses to weaken his criticism.

The volume contains the minutes of his talks with the CPI leader Z. A. Ahmed on June 28, 1945. Nehru bluntly told him: "My contention is that due to their attachment to the Soviet Union and other considerations of an international character, the political thought process of the Communists is different from that of an average nationalist. There are occasions when a purely nationalist attitude comes into conflict with the Communist attitude. The primary thing with the nationalist mind is immediate national interests, while with the Communists other considerations, one of the most important of which is the safety and defence of the Soviet Union, carry a great deal of weight."

The volume contains also the text of the Report of the Committee of Inquiry set up by the Congress Working Committee to probe into charges

against the Communists. Nehru, Sardar Patel and Pant were its members. It found that "the responsibility for the August disturbances was placed by the Communists on the Congress Working Committee directly and positively in September 1942, long before the publication of Tottenham's pamphlet on the subject."

The Report concluded "In this vast conflict between the forces of Indian nationalism and British imperialism, when people were being shot down by the thousand, and many of the horrors of war were being perpetrated on unarmed people in the towns and countryside alike, the Communist Party of India appeared to be lined up with the British Government in India. It is true that they mildly criticised British policy occasionally and asked for the release of the leaders, but they also condemned as traitors many Congressmen and Congress groups and carried on a virulent campaign against the people's movement."

This volume deserves attention also because within its covers is found an authentic report of the classic Nehru quote on corruption — "I do not kill even a small insect, but it will give me the greatest pleasure if all these profiteers were hung by the neck till they are dead." This was said in the course of a press interview on June 23, 1945. It should be mentioned that the volume covers the period from his release on June 15, 1945, till February 1946 when Attlee announced that the Cabinet Mission would be visiting India.

A few days later, Nehru said: "From what I have heard, bribery and other corrupt practices have to a large extent, got into almost every department of the Government. Perhaps a few subordinate judicial officers have tried to keep themselves aloof from it. Otherwise the whole system of the Government has been corrupt."

But the classic was his letter dated October 16, 1945 to Jogendra Singh, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council who had written to complain against Nehru's reported remarks on the Council. Nehru's reply bears quotation *in extenso*: "What I have said is that there is a lot of talk of war criminals in Europe and men of the Indian National Army are going to be tried. But a real list of war criminals should include men in the highest places in New Delhi. Further I have said that seldom, if ever, has there been so much bribery and corruption in India as during the past few years and today; that this is amazingly widespread and extends from the highest officials to the lowest and even some members of the Executive Council have not kept themselves untainted; that in any event the highest administrative and executive organs must bear the responsibility for this utter degradation of the administration. I have referred in particular to the Bengal famine and to the profits out of death made there.

"There was no reference to you nor indeed were you meant in any way, except in the sense that the whole Eexcutive Council must bear responsibility. Nor did I refer to the Indian Members of the Council.

"I must say that I feel very strongly about the moral deterioration

of the whole administrative system in India, which has naturally affected numerous departments of public activity. There is a great deal of talk of black markets. I do not think these could have spread out in the way they have done if the rot had not set in in the administration."

As Prime Minister, Nehru consistently resisted demands for judicial inquiries into charges of gross misdemeanour against Congress Ministers —Krishna Menon, Kairon and K. D. Malaviya to name a few. The three were discredited by inquiries, all the same. Nehru's equivocation harmed the country. He had a good opportunity to arrest the trend which he saw clearly. He did not.

At any rate his remarks on the responsibility of "the highest administrative and executive organs" are as applicable to himself as they are to his successors, particularly Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai.

TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR DONATIONS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF PRASAD

M. M. DAVE

AN advertisement published by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams in VISHWABHASHA, a Sanskrit language Quarterly, on the last Buddha Poornima reads as under :

"A GREAT SCHEME GRAND AND GLORIOUS"

"Do you wish to make PERMANENT LADDU Danam to all the devotees visiting Lord Venkateshwara in any particular day every year ?

This is a Sacred Scheme with provision for every pilgrim visiting the Temple getting one Laddu of 25 grams free. The Donor will be twice blessed : will receive the blessings of the Lord and the benedictions of thousands of devotees every year for the magnificent munificence.

The Scheme commences from April 5, 1981, the Telugu Ugadi day. The Donation is entitled to income-tax exemption under Section 80 G (2)(b) of the Income-tax Act, 1961.

The Salient Features of the Scheme are :

O. The Devotee has to donate Rs. One Lakh as endowment towards this scheme by means of a crossed draft in favour of the Executive Officer TTD drawn on any bank in India. The interest will be utilised for preparation of 25,000 laddus 25 grams each in his name.

O. The distribution will be done on any day of the devotee's choice including with his birth day, wedding anniversary, parents' shradh day, starting of companies, annual accounts opening or closing".

The advertisement further mentions the facilities the Temple will provide to the Donor which include Accommodation in the V.I.P. Guest House, free darshan for family (five persons) every year and 6 T.T.D. laddus and 6 Vadas as prasadam and one Vastram as Bahumanam, etc.

It is true that Tirupati Bhavan has become a politically important temple to which politicians holding high office go for darshan and blessings, charging their transport and other expenses to the public exchequer which run into lakhs and the prasad is also being sent by special planes overseas for helping the big receiving medical treatment in foreign hospitals at the public exchequer's cost. The Almighty residing in Tirupati has thus become more or less a mute witness to his devotees in high offices increasing the burden on the poorest of the poor in our country, and offering worship to Him and enjoying His Prasadam as and when they need it.

Ours is a secular State which cannot under its constitution attach any importance or allow any of its revenues to be utilised for any body, (be he the President of the country or a starving citizen lying in a corner of a public street), getting a good place in heaven or a spiritually high attainment in this world itself. How then those in high offices are allowed to charge their expenses for paying visits to Tirupati Bhavan at intervals and how the Accountant General keeps his eyes closed against such expenditures aggregating lakhs of rupees, is a point which requires to be clarified? But who will do that? Not the politicians who enjoy the benefit, nor the legislators, nor any executives, nor the judiciary. Why should they when even the Almighty Himself has chosen to be a mute spectator of all that happens before His very eyes?

It may be that those who visit the Temple might be saying that they are going to the town concerned for discharge of their public duties, and their visit to the Temple is only incidental on their way to the place of duty.

But it is not understood how the exemption under Section 80G(2) (b) can have its application for the benefit of those who donate funds for the aforesaid GREAT SCHEME GRAND AND GLORIOUS. The Section by itself reads as under:

80G *Deduction in respect of donations to certain funds charitable institutions etc.*:

(1) In computing the total income of an assessee there shall be deducted in accordance with and subject to the provisions of this section —

(i) .....

(ii) in any other case an amount equal to fifty per cent of the aggregate of the sums specified in sub-section (2).

(2) The sums referred to in sub-section (1) shall be the following, namely:

(a) .....

(b) any sums paid by the assessee in the previous year as donations for the *renovation or repair* of any such temple, mosque, gurdwara, church or other place as is notified by the Central Government in the Official Gazette to be of historic, archeological or artistic importance or to be a place of public worship of renown throughout any State or States.

Further Explanation 3 to this Section specifically states that "Charitable purpose" does not include any purpose the whole or substantially the whole of which is of a religious nature.

There cannot be any doubt that the purpose of the above SCHEME GREAT AND GLORIOUS is not other than religious, the more so when it specifically states that a 25 gram laddu will be given to each devotee of the Lord and not to anybody else however starving he may be who is not a devotee of the Lord. Thus the Scheme is not in any manner a charitable scheme. It is purely religious. Out of Rs. One Lakh which the donor will donate, Rs. 33,000 will be indirectly borne by the common man through his Government which claims to be secular. The question which arises is can a free citizen of Republic of Bharat be forced to contribute 33 per cent of the cost a wealthy man incurs for his spiritual benefit and also for his VIP treatment and bahumanam by the administrators of a Temple trust ? If a Hindu temple has the right and authority to distribute laddus to its devotees and VIP treatment and Bahumanam to its rich donors and claim deduction in income tax assessment for its donors, will it not be equally legal for muslim mosques to kill ten thousand goats on bakri id or some such other occasion and feed the muslim population openly on meat and claim exemption from income tax for those who spend after the purchase and offering of goats to Allah and feeding the Namazwala with the meat ? Is all this admissible under our Constitution wedded to secularism ?

Apart from this the donations exempt under the section reproduced above are those made for *renovation and repairs* and not for giving laddus. Will any taxation expert say how distribution of laddus and extending VIP treatment to the wealthy donors can be interpreted as *carrying out renovations and repairs* to the Temple ?

KISS AND THE MAD MULLAHS

M. K. RATHISH

THE Indian Express of 23rd September, 1982 carried Reuter's report under the headline "Ban on Kiss". It read: "Iran's Islamic legislators have ruled that kissing for sexual pleasure has to stop. Kissing for sexual pleasure, drinking alcohol and homosexuality are among a list of moral offences officially outlawed by legislation passed in Iran's Parliament this week". The report goes on to add that the

first-time offenders against the kissing ban would be awarded a punishment of 100 lashes.

This is what happens when religion goes into the heads of people. Dr. Kovoor had said that religious faith is a mild sort of mental illness. The more intense the faith, the more virulent the illness. Fanatics are raving mad people who should be locked up. Ayatullah Khomeini should have been consigned to an institution for the mentally ill long ago.

Religion robs man of his capacity to think rationally. He loses his humanism. In his attempts to curry favour with a blood-thirsty, tribal god he loses his love and respect for his fellow human beings. In Iran there are 50,000 people rotting in jails. 20,000 people have been killed in the last one year alone. All in the name of a god they have never known.

It is the women who suffer the most under such a dispensation. They cannot go out. They have to wrap themselves up in hidious, tent—like robes leaving only their eyes uncovered. No sports for them. No colleges. No studies. Through the centuries they had painfully inched themselves to a situation where a little education and a freer mode of dressing were condoned. Now all that is gone with one swish. The Ayatullah has ordained that Iran should march back into the dark ages from which it had emerged. The clock has been turned back by centuries. And God is supposed to be happy. God the merciful.

What is happening in Iran is a warning to all of us. We would have been in a similar situation if we had not been lucky to have liberal, rationalist leaders like Nehru. Call it Rama Rajya or by any other name, a theocracy is a theocracy.

The Kingdom of God should be left in heaven. It should not be brought down to earth. We should be happy with our bumbling democracies where ordinary mortals run things in an ordinary way, making mistakes, but doing a little good. At least mullahs and mad men will not be able to play havoc with the lives of ordinary people.

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